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# TOPONYMIC DATA FILES: DATA ELEMENTS REQUIRED

## Core data fields for the records of approved Canadian geographical names

Paper submitted by Canada**

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** Prepared by Helen Kerfoot, Executive Secretary, Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical Names.

92-32363 3461d (E) 240792 *310792*

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Since 1897, Canada's national names authority has been maintaining records of official geographical names for places and features within the country. Initially names records were kept on filing cards, stored alphabetically by province or territory.

Over many decades these records were added to, or corrected, by hand, and the type of information and how it was recorded varied, sometimes depending upon the interests or available time of individual employees. By the 1960s many provinces and territories had their own card systems, in addition to the drawers of names records maintained by the Secretariat of the Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical Names. In the late 1970s automation of names records began, and a more consistent approach was needed for fields (or elements) of data to be associated with each name to be entered into digital toponymic data bases.

Provision of various fields of information for the national records has until quite recently been very informal. However, with the sometimes diverging needs of provincial/territorial and federal authorities, the CPCGN recently decided to document "core" fields of data for geographical names records. These are required fields for all official names, which are supplied by members of the CPCGN for storage on the Canadian Geographical Names Data Base (CGNDB), maintained by the federal department of Energy, Mines and Resources (EMR). Each decision-making authority on the CPCGN may, of course, store additional fields of data to suit their own requirements (e.g. larger scale map sheet numbers, documentation on people interviewed during field collection of names, etc.). At the same time, EMR may add other fields of information to the core fields received for the official names being entered into the CGNDB (e.g. identification of a feature within a national park, or which crosses a provincial or international boundary).

The following core data fields for official name records being provided for entry into the CGNDB were approved by the CPCGN in October 1990.

1. **Geographical name** (of a feature, place, etc.).

   Approved names should be in the authorized form, including the appropriate capitalization, diacritics, hyphens, included abbreviations (e.g. St.) etc.

2. **Province(s) and/or territory(ies)** in which the feature/place is located.

3. **Status** which indicates, at least, a differentiation between

   a) currently approved/official, and
   b) **not** currently approved/official.

4. **Cross-reference** to formerly approved name, if a name change is being made.

5. **Date** on which a name was approved, or, where applicable, ceased to be approved for current use.

6. Indication of **type of feature/place** designated (e.g. river, town, provincial historic site, etc.).

7. **Latitude and longitude**

   - at mouth of flowing water features
   - at centre of other physical features

- where appropriate and necessary for meaningful identification, coordinates should include seconds, referenced to an identified datum; coordinates for **place** names should, wherever possible, be identified with seconds
- for flowing water features, coordinates should also be provided for the "head" of the named feature.

8. **NTS map reference** - All 1:50 000 National Topographic System (NTS) map sheets which include the named entity should be indicated; the first one listed should match the designated coordinates. (Canadian Hydrographic Service charts should be used if the feature falls outside the NTS framework.)

9. At least one element of **locational data** (e.g. first level administrative or geographical division) within a province or territory, if such a division exists; or section, township and range, if applicable.

   (n.b. In the past, no divisions have consistently been recorded for Yukon and Newfoundland.).

10. Brief **narrative of location**.

11. **Graphic representation** to show limits of name application - to be usable at 1:50 000.

It should be noted that very often more information than the minimum core fields may be supplied. For example, more details of status may be provided (such as, "name change", "altered application", etc.) for a currently approved name. It must also be realized that only recently have there been requirements for coordinates to be read to the accuracy of seconds (rather than just degrees and minutes); or for headwater coordinates to be supplied for flowing water features; or for all NTS map sheets to be provided for sizeable features. Consequently, although this information is now being supplied for records being added to, or changed, on the CGNDB, it is not yet available for most records previously entered in the digital data base.

In addition to the core fields, other information is considered "highly desirable":

1. **Second level of administrative unit** (where applicable), within a province or territory (e.g. township in Ontario, parish in New Brunswick).

2. **Unofficial variant names** to an approved name.

3. Summary of **origin or historical data**.

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The "core" fields of data are now also becoming very important in relation to wide distribution of digital data. Although some jurisdictions may for particular reasons (e.g. copyright, privacy, etc.) wish to restrict access to certain elements of information contained in a names record, it is agreed by CPCGN members that all "core" data fields should be available for dissemination, as widely as possible.

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